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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, February 16, 1938

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Subject: "NOTES FOR FEBRUARY FOOD-SHOPPERS." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture, and the Consumers' Counsel, Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

--ooOoo--

Just arrived is the latest news for the listener who does the food shopping -- notes on prices of seasonal foods and supplies.

The first news is that you can expect this month to find the price of butter and eggs and beef lower and the price of cabbage and onions and sweetpotatoes higher. Poultry and lamb prices may also go up slightly. But probably the price of apples, oranges, grapefruit, and potatoes will stay about the same.

Now about supplies. You'll probably find more apples and oranges on the market than a year ago, but less grapefruit during the rest of the current marketing season. Apples these days are coming from both cold and common storage. During the first half of the year the apples on the market are storage apples. On the first of January this year there were record-size cold-storage holdings -- two-fifths larger than a year ago. There are no records of common storage holdings but trade reports indicate larger stocks this year. You can expect orange supplies for the rest of the winter and spring to be about a third larger than a year ago. The remaining grapefruit supplies will be about a tenth less than in 1937, but larger than in previous seasons. Because of the large supplies, apple and orange prices probably will continue lower than they were last year. Grapefruit prices are likely to be the same or slightly higher than in 1937.

Now about tangerines. Shipments of these so-called "kid glove oranges" continue through April, but February usually marks the last month of heavy marketings. Prices are expected to continue slightly higher than a year ago.

What about the early vegetables that are coming to market? Predictions are for larger crops of most early vegetables -- larger crops than a year ago. You can expect more snap beans, beets and celery on the market. As for cabbages and carrots, supplies of these two vegetables will probably be about the same size as in 1937. During February marketings of snap beans and green peas and new carrots usually increase seasonally.

Cabbage prices probably will continue moving up during February and remain higher than a year ago. Supplies at present consist of old crop cabbage from northern storage holdings and new cabbage from southern States.

Storage holdings on January first were about 40 percent less than a year ago. Shipments of early cabbage through late January were about a third less than in 1937 due to a late season in Texas which is the principal early-cabbage producing State.

Already from both Florida and Texas small quantities of new potatoes are going to market. But until May old potatoes from storage will make up the bulk of potatoes on the market in northern States. Potato supplies during the first half of this year will probably be larger than in 1937. Storage holdings of old potatoes on January first were around a fourth larger than a year ago but about average size. Because of larger supplies, potato prices have been lower than last season and have shown little change since October. Prices probably will continue below their 1937 level during the first half of the year with little change expected during February.

Now here's news that sounds like spring. This is the month for the first asparagus of the season on the market. Prices on this first asparagus are relatively high. But as supplies get larger, prices go down sharply. Lowest prices on asparagus are usually in April. The number of acres planted to early asparagus this year is slightly larger than last year. Most of the early crop comes from California. White asparagus has a milder flavor than green asparagus and is used mostly for canning. Green asparagus is more popular and should be green for almost its entire length. Asparagus of good quality is tender yet firm and has close, compact tips.

More springlike news. Strawberry shipments will increase this month. To date strawberry shipments have been considerably less than a year ago because of freeze damage in Florida. The time to make plans for a strawberry celebration appears to be May, unless you use local northern berries, for the predictions are that the peak movement of strawberries will come in May.

Do you like onions? Then you'll be interested in the news that the shallot crop is expected to be about a fifth larger this year than last. Shallots, you know, are those little onions -- miniature onions, you might say, often eaten fresh as green onions and when matured and dried used for flavoring. The peak movement of shallots is this month -- February.

What about spring lamb on the menu? The outlook for lamb supplies from January through April has been changed because a larger number of lambs were found to be on feed this January than were expected. So slaughter this year will probably be larger than a year ago. The fewer grass-fat lambs on the market will offset only a part of the larger number of grain-fed lambs. As for the price of lamb, that will go up seasonally less than usual. So prices during this season will probably average considerably under a year ago.

You see how it is, listeners. You can start planning your spring meals already -- strawberries and asparagus, new onions, new potatoes, and spring lamb.

